In this chapter, Stroud analyses the response to scepticism given by G. E. Moore in his famous ‘Proof of an External World’.

Moore seeks to prove that the proposition that there are no external things is in fact false. His proof consists of two premisses and a conclusion: ‘Here is one hand’, ‘And here is another’, therefore ‘Two human hands exist’; the conclusion follows from the premisses, and establishes conclusively that there are external things.

Contrasting his interpretation with those of N. Malcolm and A. Ambrose, Stroud argues that Moore in his proof fails to refute philosophical scepticism, but nevertheless makes a significant and legitimate use of the words ‘I know’ in formulating it and succeeds in establishing his conclusion from premisses he knows. Stroud argues that Moore, although he himself does not speak in those terms, can be understood to be giving a conclusive internal answer to the question whether he knows that there are external objects: a response from within his current knowledge to a question about knowledge that merely asks whether a piece of knowledge is already included among all the things he knows, or can be included among them by finding good reason to accept that thing on the basis of other things he already knows; but while this is a perfectly common and legitimate use of the expression ‘know’, it does nothing to answer the external question about knowledge that purports to cast doubt on all knowledge.
claims at once, and it is this question that must be answered if the sceptic is to be refuted.

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